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**Review of *How it Works: Recovering Citizens in Post-Welfare Philadelphia*. Robert P. Fairbanks, II. Reviewed by Jennifer R. Zelnick.**

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Robert P. Fairbanks, II, *How it Works: Recovering Citizens in Post-Welfare Philadelphia*. University of Chicago Press, 2009. \$70.00 hardcover, \$27.50 papercover.

In 1982, Pennsylvania's Public Act 75 created a new category of destitution for drug addicts and alcoholics that made them eligible for 9 months of meager cash assistance and food stamp benefits. This restructuring of the general assistance program in PA, set against the larger context of the 'U-turn' in social welfare policy, "primed the pump" for the recovery house movement in Kensington, Philadelphia. The recovery houses and their street level entrepreneurial operators are the setting and lead characters in Robert Fairbanks *How it Works* (the title is a reference to a chapter in the AA "big book," the main text for the 12-step self-help movement).

The recovery houses occupy abandoned or dilapidated row homes in a former working class neighborhood in post-industrial Philadelphia. Financed through the cash assistance and food stamp benefits provided to addicts and alcoholics in need of a stable roof over their heads while they attempt to 'work a program' (get clean and sober), recovery houses are run by operators willing to bridge the gap created by the lack of affordable housing and inpatient treatment options, in addition to and the devolution of authority engendered by Reagan's Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA) and Pennsylvania Governor Thornburg's ACT 75. Without a policy initiative, licensing body or city mandate, Fairbanks explains, the operators use the minimal requirements of a verified address to access the welfare benefits of single, adult addicts and alcoholics that are then used to provide basic needs of food and shelter to recovering addicts.

Fairbanks examines the recovery house phenomenon and the role of the operators as "re-regulating urban subjectivity and remaking postindustrial space." The interplay between the language and goals of the self-help, 12 step movements (working a program in order to become a "productive member of society," the expectation of "self-transformation") and the pressures facing the urban poor in a landscape bereft of opportunities underscore the contradictions that play out as recovery house operators "govern" their programs.

The dynamic between the formal policy structures and the Kensington recovery houses supports Fairbanks' assertion that the city's tolerance of the quasi-legal recovery houses is evidence of a process of "managed persistence," well expressed through interviews with personnel at the City of Philadelphia Department of Licensing and Inspections (L & I) and Public Welfare. While most houses are "illegal" in that they violate safety/zoning codes, the department has 45 inspectors and 60,000 vacant properties and is underfunded to enforce safety codes. Likewise, Fairbanks' interviews with the public welfare department reveal a "no news is good news" approach to not regulating the recovery houses; his key informant expresses the "hope" that houses are conscientious and well run, and like the L & I, bemoans the fact that the city doesn't have the resources to properly regulate. The fact that poor recovering addicts are referred to recovery houses, and even sent from poor cities in neighboring states, speaks to their role in compensating for services that the formal system fails to provide.

One of the key achievements of this book is the juxtaposition of complex, rigorous academic analysis and the analysis of the street level entrepreneurs in their own words. In some studies of the impacts of neoliberal policies, the subjectivity of the poor and marginalized is, at best, an afterthought and, at worst, fodder for argument. Not so in this book. Fairbanks has earned the trust and respect of his subjects and in turn shows them the same respect. His rich and careful building of the context allow the words of his participants to really shine through.

Fairbanks' book, which would make great reading for a new curriculum in contemporary social welfare policy, brings together analytic frameworks from social welfare history, urban social theory, policy, philosophy and ethnography. His documentation of the recovery house phenomenon in the post welfare-reform era brings to mind the long "shadow of the poorhouse," and how these times will be viewed historically.

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